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SIR fear: 500+ B'deshis detained while trying to return home

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Kolkata: Several hundred Bangladeshi nationals — including minors — were intercepted by BSF at the Hakimpur check post near Swarupnagar in North 24 Parganas on Monday morning. They were allegedly attempting to cross the border to return home amid growing fears linked to the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
Personnel of BSF's 143rd Battalion detected the movement while monitoring a riverine stretch of the border.

By Tuesday afternoon, the number of stranded Bangladeshis at the Hakimpur border point swelled to over 500, said BSF officials. Carrying blankets, bags and essential belongings, the detainees — who have been camping near the Zero Line since Monday night — admitted to entering India illegally and working in suburban pockets of Kolkata without valid documents.
None possessed passports, visas or identity papers, officials said.
Many detainees said they had been living illegally for years in Birati, Madhyamgram, Rajarhat, New Town, Salt Lake and surrounding areas, working primarily as domestic workers, daily labourers or construction workers.
Earlier this month, BSF intercepted 94 Bangladeshis attempting to cross back through the Tarali border near Hakimpur.

Speaking to reporters, several detainees said the intensified documentation scrutiny under SIR had triggered panic among those living without papers. "I was staying in a rented house in Nimta for more than a decade and working as domestic help. I have no documents. Now I want to return to Satkhira," said Taklima Khatun.

Another labourer, Mohammad Arifuzzaman, who lived in Madhyamgram, said many like him worked at construction sites for years but now feared legal consequences. Domestic worker Sonali Khatun, who worked at Rajarhat, said she and her husband left "because of SIR", while another migrant, Nazmul Hossain, said he had not returned home since arriving several years ago but now wanted to leave.

Basirhat SP Hossain Mehdi Rahman clarified that none of the detainees were handed over to state police. A BSF officer familiar with protocol said that once such migrants are detained, their identities and socio-economic backgrounds are verified through questioning. Basic data, including fingerprints and photographs, are collected before the BSF contacts their Bangladeshi counterpart — Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) — for repatriation.

"There has been a drastic rise in the number of people trying to exfiltrate from Tarali–Hakimpur in the past two months. Earlier, the numbers were in single or low double digits in a month. Now, we are stopping exfiltration attempts involving three-digit numbers every day," the source said.

The officer revealed that unlike earlier, when BGB largely refused to take back detained persons, acceptance rate has risen markedly. "Earlier, out of 10 cases, they would accept one. Now they are accepting most of them, provided we share verifiable details. When details are insufficient and BGB does not acknowledge identity, BSF sometimes pushes them back because holding them here serves no purpose," the source said.

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